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**Reference:* Anti-Influenza virus activities of commercial oregano oils and their carriers. Journal of Applied Pharmaceutical Science 2012; 02(07) 214-18.

Michael Hudson

on greed, debt & the inevitable housing crisis

interview by Joseph Roberts

Michael Hudson is one of the world's leading economists. He acts as an economic advisor to governments worldwide including Greece, Iceland, Latvia and China on finance and taxation. www.michael-hudson.com

Joseph Roberts: You wrote *The Bubble and Beyond* before the 2008 financial crash happened.

Michael Hudson: [There were] articles I'd written since about 2004, basically, and I hadn't yet put it all together in a book. I'd submitted a book to a number of publishers, *The Fictitious Economy*, forecasting there was going to be a crash in 2008. One year before at *Harper's*, I published all the charts based on this book, showing exactly why it was going to happen. Then it happened right on schedule.

> So it turns out that the real estate boom that people think is a sign of prosperity and wealth is actually impoverishing Vancouver by driving it into debt.

JR: What causes bubbles like that?

MH: Debt. The reason bubbles burst is that they're financed by debt. People will lend more and more and more against real estate or companies and the cost of servicing this debt, the interest and amortization, exceeds the cash flow, the profit or income that's being earned, and there's a break in the chain of payments. The tendency of debt in every economy is to grow exponentially. Every interest rate is a doubling time. It can be thought of as that. And the debts grow independently of the economy.

When debts grow faster than the economy's ability to pay, there's a crash. That's why the booms, the build-up and expansion of a business cycle are rather slow, but the crash comes very quickly. So it's really not a cycle at all. It's not like *Schumpeter* described in his book on business cycles: a very smooth sine curve. It's a ratchet effect.

They'll pay all of the increased rental value to the bank as interest because they're hoping for a capital gain, because that's where the action has been for the last 50 years in the US. Not income. Most people have got rich, not by saving their earnings, but they've got rich by the capital gain, which includes middle class families that got rich, not by saving their wages, but by their house appreciating.

photo by Sean Egan

JR: Why did Wall Street get bailed out in 2008 rather than Main Street? The US House and the Senate first initially rejected the bail-out. What happened after their first vote?

MH: A lot of pressure was put on the Republicans to say, "Wait a minute, most of your campaign contributions come from the financial sector, the FIRE sector: Finance, Insurance and Real Estate. Who are you going to be for, the voters or your campaign contributors?" And the politicians said, "Our campaign contributors. They're our constituency." Or, as Hillary Clinton's people called them, "the donor class" – the large financial firms and monopoly real estate investors. So President Obama, essentially influenced by his mentor Wall Streeter Robert Rubin, decided to save the banks, not the economy.

JR: Vancouver, Toronto and other Canadian cities have these huge, expensive bank towers housing the Royal, TD, Montreal and Scotia banks, other financial corporate palaces and now even Trump Towers. But for the majority of people, there is a housing crisis. Housing has drastically changed. In 1957, my parents bought a brand-new, two-story, three-bedroom home in Coquitlam for $13,000. It had a big back yard where we put in apple trees, a large front yard and a double car garage. Within three years, my parents had it paid off. They both worked; my dad was a machinist and my mother a schoolteacher. We were a working class family. Our children can't do that today.

MH: That's right. People think that if their grandparents and parents could somehow buy a house and it would go up in value, that would be their retirement fund. Since WWll, that's how the middle class was essentially created. They often made more money on house appreciation in a year than they would make working for a whole year. And it's gone up. In some cases, they made more on the house appreciation than all of their salaries for a lifetime.

That's come to an end and people don't want to acknowledge that era is over. Already, the economy is fully loaned-up. That's the word that Wall Street uses. "Loaned-up" means there's no more debt it can carry. All of the surplus income that families have, over and above basic subsistence needs, is paid to the banks and the real estate sector, the FIRE sector. There's no more leeway in the economy to grow because it's all been pledged for debt service. The growth is over. That's why since 2008, the US economy has been shrinking, except for the wealthiest five percent. The bottom 95% have actually shrunk.

JR: Last year, the amount of capital gains in housing exceeded all of the labour combined in Vancouver. How did that occur?

MH: It happened because banks are willing to lend so much more money that the bank loans bid up the price of property. Property is worth as much as a bank lends against it, and it's true that foreign investors have come – speculators Blackstone, I'm told, from America. The hedge fund was bought here. Chinese and European investors have all been bidding up the price of commercial property and luxury buildings.

But for the rest of Vancouver, [with regard to] the vast majority of buildings and houses, banks have lent more and more money because they don't particularly care if the occupants go broke. If the occupants have to borrow so much to buy a home in Vancouver, over a million dollars for many single homes in Vancouver, well, in order to pay debt service on a million dollars, you have to earn about $100,000 a year. If they don't earn that, if they go under, the *continued pg 21 ...*

common ground

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The corporate powers that be, want to stay in power; but we, the people, will take our power back now

No matter what new constellation of politicians appear after an election, *Common Ground* will continue researching and educating ourselves. For democracy to work we must be an informed and engaged electorate. The only safe place for democracy is with the people themselves. Two fundamental elements must come together in order to have a real democracy. First, we must remove big money from politics. Big money buys politicians and campaign advertising. Big money corrupts politicians and then bends them to their bidding. Secondly, we must get rid of the old unfair first-past-the-post / winner-takes-all voting system. We need electoral reform with proportional representation. These twins of true democracy have been orphaned far too long.

While this pair makes perfect sense to the majority, it scares the greedy financial ruling class who get the powers of government to control us. This means the billionaires will never give up, without a fight, their entitlement to the unfair share of power the neo-feudal system provides. When you read Michael Hudson's enlightened article in this edition you will see a way out of debt peonage and the housing crisis. Yes, there is way to true progress and freedom. It will not be given lightly. We must be informed and take action.

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Realism and compassion

For many, doing what comes naturally is an appealing concept. (For a good laugh, look up "Doin' what comes natur'lly" on Youtube, from *Annie Get Your Gun*.) Often, the appeal comes from a realistic concern regarding food mass produced in systems never envisioned a century ago, using toxic pesticides and genetically modified organisms.

The result can be a rather confused mix of practices. People will eat a cow that was permitted to live in a fenced field for much of its life, ate fodder trucked from thousands of miles away and was later sent down the same slaughterhouse line as factory-farmed animals. They will consume a chicken that was sufficiently free range to live in the equivalent of a giant indoor litter box, with a small door to the outdoors that it never reached while alive. Such birds can have increased risk of infection from E coli and other bacteria and of violent pecking and cannibalization from their caged neighbours, compared with chickens protected by confinement in tiny cages with wire walls and bottoms.

"Natural," when it comes to human practices,

turns out not to be a helpful word.

"There's a downside to taking birds out of their cages in that they're free, but they're also free to get hurt and free to get in trouble," says Tina Widowski, Egg Farmers of Canada research chair in poultry welfare at the University of Guelph.

Groups such as Mercy for Animals record undercover images depicting horrendous living conditions and abuse. For some, these stories and images stimulate a quest for natural fare that is also linked with compassion for animals. Yet someone might spend $1,000 at the vet for their pet and then eat part of an equally intelligent animal for dinner. So what *can* guide our evolving dietary practices?

"Natural," when it comes to human practices, turns out not to be a helpful word. Our actions over many centuries include war, rape and cruel treatment of other humans and animals. Perhaps a more valuable word to guide our behaviour is compassion.

We now have options unavailable to us a century ago, even a generation ago. We can enjoy fresh produce year-round, including legumes, soy foods, grains, vegetables, nuts, seeds and fruits that are organic and GMO free. Scientific evidence provides indisputable evidence that an optimal diet for humans need not include any animal products. Vitamin B-12 comes not from animals or plants, but from bacteria. In animal products, B-12's origins are bacterial contamination. In a clean, plant-based diet, we can choose fortified foods or a supplement. As it turns out, our paleo ancestors consumed fibre, a valuable and protective dietary component found only in plant foods, at levels of about 100g a day. This is higher than most people on entirely plant-based diets today, apart from elite athletes who are sufficiently active to consume a *lot* of calories.

Vesanto Melina is a dietitian and an award-winning author of nutrition books.

EVENTS: **MAY 26**: 7:15 - 9pm, co-author Brenda Davis speaks on the Paleo diet at Vancouver Cohousing, www.meetup.com/MeatlessMeetup/events/236732131/
MAY 28: Brenda speaks at VegExpo in Vancouver, vegexpo.ca

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What Health Canada won't tell you about their NHP proposals

– but you should tell your MP

Health Canada (HC) never changes! They say one thing when behind the scenes their true motivations are completely different. With the media in tow, they have launched another round of consultations attempting to whitewash their proposals for the regulation of Natural Health Products (NHPs).

See: "Report of Online Consultation on Modernizing the Regulation of Self-care Products in Canada" (March 2017): www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/programs/consultation-regulation-self-care-products/full-report.html

Make no mistake; the sole purpose of these consultations is to 'manufacture consent' from stakeholders, the public and politicians for what HC is actually attempting, which is to provide a mechanism for pharmaceutical companies to monopolize NHPs for serious chronic diseases, as drugs derived from natural constituents appear, protected by use-patents.

As has been the case for over three decades, Health Canada's policies on NHPs are being heavily influenced by the Therapeutic Products Division (TPD), which regulates prescription drugs. The TPD acts as an ambassador(s) for Big Pharma. It is all part of an international alliance between pharma and regulators called ICMRA, the International Coalition of Medicines Regulatory Authorities. (See www.hc-sc.gc.ca/dhp- mps/intactivit/drug-medicament/icmra-eng.php)

ICMRA is looking to internationally harmonize regulations on all medicines, an agenda Health Canada has ardently supported and prime in their sights are NHPs. The current HC proposals boil down to a purely bureaucratic and corporate agenda that has absolutely nothing to do with the benefit of Canadians.

How can such statements be made? In light of examining what Health Canada is actually *doing*, what they are *saying* doesn't hold water.

Firstly, their most prominent theme is that they are committed to "modernizing" the current regulations. Fact: Canada already has the most modern NHP regulations on the planet! This is like saying you are committed to modernizing a car that automatically drives itself. There isn't anything more modern. Our regulations are light years ahead of any other country, with mandatory Good Manufacturing Processes and testing of ingredients. As a result, Canadian-made NHPs are in high demand in international markets. So what is HC so intent on changing??

The answer involves the fact that when HC formed the NHP Regulations they never thought so many NHPs would be able to support their claims with scientific evidence demonstrating efficacy. In fact, it was assumed by both HC and the natural health industry that scores of products would be eliminated. One prominent HC inspector was quoted during a plant inspection as estimating that up to 70% of the NHPs on the market would vanish. But the NHP industry rose to the challenge.

As new science on NHPs continued to mount, HC was faced with a new problem: that a large number of claims were being approved by the HC directorate in charge, for example, the Natural Health Products Directorate (NHPD). These claims were/are based on peer-reviewed scientific or traditional evidence. Hence, large amounts of information have been disseminated to the public about what NHPs are capable of. The pharmaceutical industry began to complain NHP claims were not supported, when in fact most were and the NHPs were approved by Health Canada.

Yet the HC document above states the following: "... Many participants from the NHP sector are not supportive of this proposed requirement for scientific proof to support health claims, fearing that it would negatively affect the affordability, availability, and diversity of these products."

This is doublespeak. The direct inference that NHP claims do not have to be proven is totally false and a major deception being purported by both Health Canada and the media. Presently, to be licensed, a product must make a claim and it must support it using at least two peer-reviewed human trials or show it has been used for at least 50 years for the claim in question. Also, every ingredient in a formula has to provide a scientific or traditional rationale for its inclusion. The Natural Health Products Directorate (still operating within the larger NNHPD framework) routinely rejects submitted studies for inadequacy because of poor design or small sample size, etc. So it is untrue that the new proposals are just trying to ensure that NHPs prove their claims because they already have to prove their claims, as per the Natural Health Products Regulations.

What HC is actually proposing is that if any NHP claim involves a medical condition, the company in question would have to run clinical trial(s) to be approved, just like pharmaceutical drugs, regardless of how many peer-reviewed third-party studies there are supporting the NHP claim.

This is ludicrous. Firstly, with zero Canadian deaths on record from NHPs in over 60 years, their safety levels eclipse that of prescription and [over-the-counter] OTC drugs, virtually every one of which has caused death. Further, many NHP ingredients have been used for centuries and intensely scientifically studied for decades. So if both the safety and efficacy of an NHP have already been firmly established, what purpose do further clinical trials serve, other than making it more expensive? The answer: a scheme to keep NHP companies out of the market. This is where the pharmaceutical industry is planning to exert their patents, such as this one on apigenin from chamomile (or celery) for cancer: www.google.com/patents/EP2403497A1?cl=en

Other falsehoods being purported by HC are that they are taking a "Risk-based Approach" and the more serious the condition, the "higher risk" the product in question. This is totally invalid. For example, there is ample evidence that quercetin, derived from citrus or onions, is effective for allergies and is anti-cancer. But what you use it for doesn't change quercetin's inherent safety! By this logic, eating a teaspoon of cinnamon on porridge isn't dangerous, but taking the same amount of cinnamon, at the same meal, in a capsule for high blood sugar is. This is not a "risk-based" approach, it is a "USE-BASED" approach and the only thing it protects is pharmaceutical dominion over disease. If HC was really taking a risk-based approach, they wouldn't be lumping NHPs together with OTC drugs because their risk levels are not comparable. This exact point was already considered and decided on by the Standing Committee on Health and was one of the driving forces behind establishing a separate set of regulations for NHPs.

HC says it combined the two directorates to save money. Yet if they were really trying to save money, why would they abandon a set of regulations that took 10 years to complete, and at the same time create an entire new directorate, the Marketed Health Products Directorate (MHPD), just to monitor product claims?

Is this how Canadians want their tax-money spent? Inspectors roving all over the country inspecting NHPs who have killed no one? Just think about how disproportional the concern and resources that HC has spent policing NHPs is compared to the low level of harm they have caused, not to mention their benefits or how much money they have saved our health care system. Does this make sense? No, it doesn't because that's not what its about. It's about money and market control.

It is critical that you provide your viewpoint to both Health Canada and your elected officials in Ottawa. The best form of communication is a letter mailed to your MP. But whether by letter, fax, phone, or e-mail, concerned Canadians need to communicate with the MPs and express their views.

Take action at www.citizensforchoice.com/action-page

Source: Citizens for Choice in Healthcare, www.citizensforchoice.com

The importance *of* good bacteria

by Dr. Mercola

photo © Monthian Ritchan-ad

Your gastrointestinal tract is home to the largest part of your body's immune system, protecting you against foreign invaders by producing acids and housing colonies of beneficial bacteria that act as a defensive army fighting to protect you from pathogens that find their way inside your body.

There are about 100 trillion microorganisms living in your gut. That's 10 times more than the total number of cells in your body (about 10 trillion). These tiny creatures make up between three to five pounds of your body weight!

> Most conventional doctors will not be able to identify the cause of your symptoms if you suffer from bad bacteria or yeast overgrowth.

Your body receives help breaking down foods into their component parts from the organisms that live in your gut (intestinal flora). These bacteria, yeasts and fungi can produce beneficial waste products as they feast on your digesting food, such as B and K vitamins that your body needs. They also function to break down some foods that your body cannot absorb by itself; they change carbs into simple sugars and proteins into the component amino acids.

But when you eat too many grains, sugars and processed foods, these foods serve as fertilizer for the bad bacteria and yeast and will cause them to rapidly multiply. One of the best things you can do for your health, including your digestive health, is eliminate sugars and processed foods as much as possible. In fact, millions of people currently suffer from yeast overgrowth and a host of maladies related to the rapid spread of the bad bacteria in your intestines. And most conventional doctors will not be able to identify the cause of your symptoms if you suffer from bad bacteria or yeast overgrowth.

Estimates are that as many as 80 million people, mostly women, are currently suffering from harmful yeast overgrowth. Symptoms of this yeast overgrowth include: Irritable bowel syndrome, migraines, PMS, cancer, vaginitis, asthma, fibromyalgia, weight gain, food allergies chronic fatigue, yeast infections and depression.

As you can see the list is long and varied, and the symptoms mimic those caused by many other diseases. So the key to good intestinal health, especially in your small intestine, is keeping an optimum balance of the helpful and harmful microorganisms. This is why probiotics ("for life") supplements are so important; they increase the ratio of "good" bacteria in your gut, and why antibiotics (against life) can interfere with the delicate balance in your gut.

In fact, contrary to what you might have heard about probiotics not surviving in the highly acidic wash of your stomach, the helpful bacteria like acidophilus thrive in an acidic environment and not only survive the stomach environment, but acidophilus will actually also create lactic acid to maintain a more acidic condition in your small intestine. Some examples of health problems that you may face if your gut microorganisms stay out of balance for long periods of time include bad breath, foul gas, toxemia, candida yeast overrun, chronic fatigue, brain fogginess, lowered immunity and impaired digestion and absorption.

This is why it pays dividends to eat some fermented foods like sauerkraut, kimchi, black garlic, miso, natto, kefir, lassi and tempeh.

If you are unable to find quality fermented foods, supplementing with a high quality probiotic product will also serve the function of multiplying the "good" bacteria found in your digestive tract. When searching for probiotic supplements, be sure to buy the highest quality you can find, because when it comes to feeding your beneficial bacteria, not all products are created equally.

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SIBO: An Overview of Small Intestinal Bacterial Overgrowth And What To Do About It
With Dr Jason Marr, BSc (Hons), ND
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Medical Variation

All healthcare systems and doctors are not created equal

Let's compare doctor A and doctor B.

A 70-year-old man with high blood pressure and high cholesterol goes to see Dr. A. Even though the man is otherwise healthy, Dr. A thinks a few pills might bring down his blood pressure so he prescribes hydrochlorothiazide (a diuretic) and ramipril (an ACE-Inhibitor). He also writes a script for rosuvastatin for the high cholesterol. Because high blood pressure and elevated cholesterol are associated with an increased risk of heart attacks, the doctor is trying to reduce those risks. Later, the patient complains about his aching muscles – possibly caused by the statin – so Doc A also prescribes an anti-inflammatory drug. This man has two 'conditions' identified and four drugs recommended.

Imagine, instead, that the same man went to see Dr. B. This doctor doesn't seem too worried by this patient's high blood pressure. After all, 'high-normal' doesn't constitute much risk so he tells the man to exercise more and watch how much salt he puts in his food. He jokes that, if his patient got off the couch more often and lost 10 pounds, his blood pressure would probably come back to normal. He also doesn't think his high cholesterol is worth treating and he tells him not to stop eating the foods he loves just because of cholesterol worries. So with doctor B, the patient walks out of the clinic with the same condition, but no drugs whatsoever.

Of course, the big question we all have is "Does the 70-year-old man with high blood pressure and cholesterol live longer (or better) under doctors who practise like Dr. A or Dr. B?"

This is known as "medical variation," a very important aspect of the practice of medicine. And it is worth studying if you want to make healthcare safer, of higher value and more effective. Studying the differences between healthcare systems can tell us a lot about whether high-spending areas versus low-spending areas get better or worse outcomes. The most famous of medical variation studies is probably the Dartmouth Atlas, which 20 years ago began looking at the differences in medical variations across the US. It found that although some states spent three times more per capita on certain medical procedures, those patients were no healthier and didn't live any longer.

Last month, a report entitled "Unnecessary Care in Canada" came out, created by the people at the Canadian Institutes of Health Information and Choosing Wisely Canada. Choosing Wisely is a "national, clinician-led campaign committed to helping patients and clinicians engage in conversations about unnecessary care." For the last few years, the group has compiled lists from almost every medical speciality on what is considered unnecessary or questionable care. For example, ordering a patient to have a CT scan for a mild head injury or an X-ray for lower back pain are unlikely to produce information of any value and shouldn't be routinely done. With over 70 specialties producing lists of questionable care (see www.choosingwiselycanada.org), I'd encourage anyone who might be facing a medical procedure or test to see whether it might be considered unnecessary and potentially harmful. It might be too early to say if these lists are affecting the kind of care Canadians are getting, but I'm hoping they are giving ammunition to patients – and a good rationale for doctors – to start asking, "Is that test, drug or procedure really necessary?"

Knowing that unneeded tests or treatments can be harmful and lead to more wasted health care resources, the Choosing Wisely people have also examined the fact of medical variation in Canada.

One example is what is called preoperative testing, the kinds of tests and blood lab work you may be asked to undergo before you have an operation. If you're asked to take tests, have X-rays or give blood samples before surgery, do they actually make a noticeable difference

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in the kind of healthcare that results? Choosing Wisely's report said that one in three patients having eye surgery had a preoperative test in Ontario, yet that rate in Alberta for the same surgery is about one in five. Do patients in Ontario do that much better than patients in Alberta? Not at all.

There are some very good reasons why two different healthcare professionals (or clinics, hospitals or even health systems) treat the same patient in vastly different ways. For one, the doctors may have different training, they may be more or less influenced or aware of evidence-based recommendations or guidelines or they may just be expressing the culture of the clinic or group they work with. Health agencies' policies, insurance and patient demand all go into determining the rate at which certain tests, treatments or drugs are ordered.

The next time you're waiting at the doctor's clinic, ask yourself if what you're being offered is due to the doctor, the culture or the rules or regulations of a clinic.

I called up Don Husereau in Ontario – he's an expert on using and interpreting health research and also a former pharmacist – and asked what he thought about medical variation.

"It sometimes gets abused," Don tells me. "They find variation and then say it's just 'uninformed clinicians' who are deviating from a 'gold standard.' But sometimes there is something not accounted for in the variation. This notion that they are doing it poorly and are not evidence based and that they are 'stupid' is an overinterpretation of data."

He says that, ultimately, "Data sometimes doesn't tell the whole story." There may be real differences between patients and he sees this in reference to vascular surgeons he works with. He says, "Some take high risk patients. Some won't. Some might do more heroic things or seek out the highest risk patients.

"When we looked at the adoption of a new minimally-invasive approach to repairing damaged aortas, it is clear Canadian doctors were less enthusiastic than their US counterparts." He went on to say, "Canadian doctors used the new approach half as much, were likely less susceptible to promotion and peer pressure and knew there was no clear evidence that either approach was better."

I agree with Don Husereau that we have to be very careful when we compare doctors or health systems because there may be other factors affecting how much or what kind of medicine is being offered.

For me, a major difference comes down to the patient and their preferences. Even though doctors are trained to encourage "patient empowerment," they may not have enough time to really probe what it is their patient actually wants. If the doctor feels the patient won't be satisfied leaving without a script, guess what happens? They're likely going to get one. Equally true is that if your physician doesn't think you really want any drugs, she is also likely going to respect that, hopefully explaining the pros and cons of avoiding a new prescription.

So the next time you're waiting at the doctor's clinic, take some time to think about variation. Ask yourself if what you're being offered is due to the doctor, the culture or the rules or regulations of a clinic? And maybe ask yourself what you can do to respectfully present your preferences. Take a look at what Choosing Wisely says about the conditions you're interested in because those lists will remind you of a very important fact: some of the medical care being offered may not be necessary or perhaps is even harmful and worth asking questions about.

We should expect some degree of variation in the kind of care our doctors and health systems deliver. We can accept that every patient is different.

Whether you go to Doctor A or Doctor B, your job is to learn what you can. Take the effort to make your preferences known –in very clear ways – because at the end of the day, you are the one that has to swallow the medicine.

For you, asking questions and questioning answers are about the most important things you can do to stay healthy.

Alan Cassels is a former drug policy researcher, a writer and the author of several books on the pharmaceutical industry. www.alancassels.com

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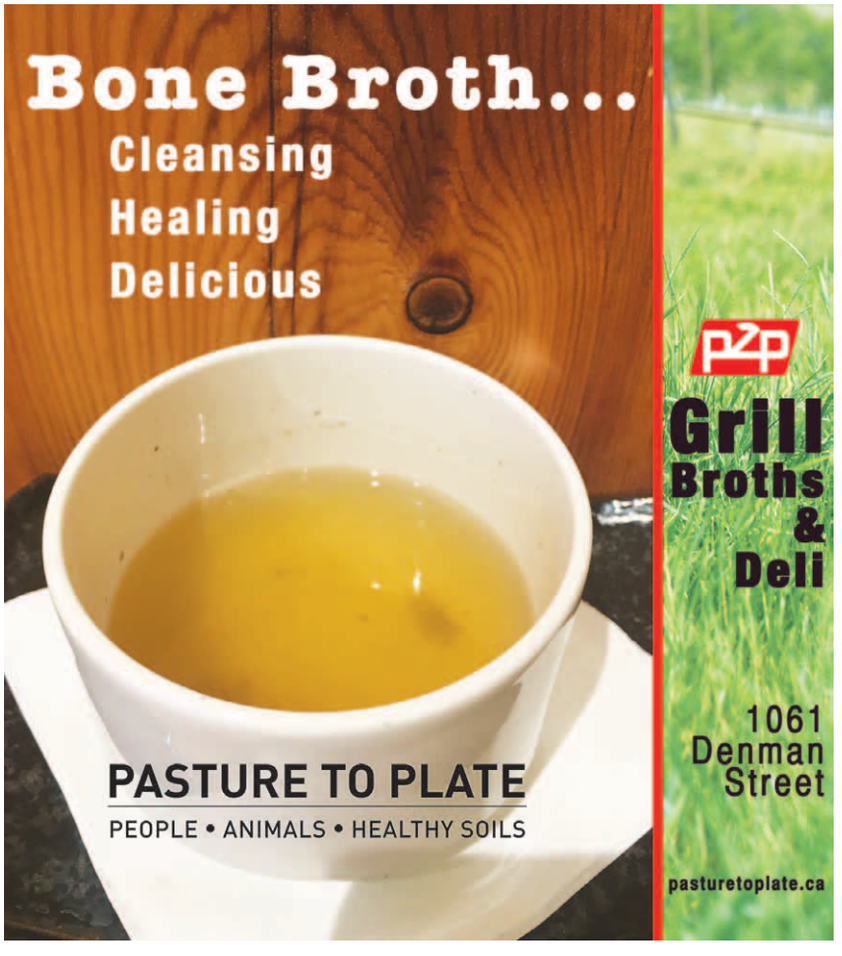

Mac McLaughlin

StarWise

May 2017

THE SAINTS and mystics teach us our fate and destiny are decided even before our bodies are formed. Our fate – destiny – aka karma is formed by our own hand, written by our thoughts and actions in previous lifetimes. Karma represents our indebtedness, both what we owe and what is owed to us. Negative thoughts and actions are chains of iron and positive thoughts and actions are chains of gold. Both are chains, designed to keep us on the wheel of transmigration in a never ending cycle of births and deaths mounting to millions of years and millions of incarnations in the 8,400,000 species of life forms on dear, old planet Earth. Then, in his great mercy, the Creator sends his Sat Gurus to the Earth to emancipate and free our souls and start us on our journey back to our true home, a place where there is no dissolution or death and only eternal love, light and bliss.

None of this was designed by man. It has existed as long as creation itself and was designed by the creator. Most of it is far too deep and complex for our limited human brain to even comprehend. Astrology in its true usefulness represents the roadmap of our karmic journey through time from the womb to the tomb. The karma we carry is inexorable, unalterable and must be worked through. Positive or negative, it is all a blessing designed to bring us into the light once again. If we were to live a life of peace, kindness, compassion and forgiveness, by the by we would surely evolve into true humane beings. As my beloved Guru Param Sant Kirpal Singh Ji would say, "You cannot wash away blood with blood, but only with the waters of forgiveness."

How many leaders run the various countries on the planet and how many minions do they have? What is the number? Let's say seven thousand; 0.0001% of seven billion is seven thousand. Yet this amount of people carry our fate in their hands. Even with all of our technology and all of our ability to be connected and communicate, we continually fail miserably to attain any lasting peace. I feel a deep shame about this – these men who continue to threaten our very existence and insist on pointing their insidiously dangerous and destructive weapons at each other. Seven thousand people saying what is going to happen to the seven billion people that live here. When will we ever learn and why do we allow these weak, short-sighted, paranoid souls to run the show?

Mac McLaughlin has been a practising, professional astrologer for more than four decades. His popular **Straight Stars** column ran in Vancouver's largest weekly newspaper for 11 years. Email mac@macsstars.com or call 604-731-1109.

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ARIES Mar 21 - Apr 19
A unique combination of planetary influences lights up your life. Innovative ideas materialize at an alarming rate. You and others may be shocked or surprised with what you come up with. Plus, you are able to put things together in a cohesive fashion. Popularity is on the rise and love is on the horizon.

TAURUS Apr 20 - May 21
Just as the full Moon lights up the night sky, the full Moon on May 10 will light up the night sky of your psyche. Epiphanies and aha moments take place. You're energized, collected and directed. Someone from the past, possibly an old flame, shows up. Maybe someone from another lifetime comes back into your life.

GEMINI May 22 - Jun 20
You're on the move, on fire and ready for all kinds of excitement and adventure. A plethora of innovative ideas stimulates your imagination. You better write them down, lest you forget half of them. Go easy and take your time as the chance for incidents and accidents is rather high. Measure twice, cut once.

CANCER Jun 21 - Jul 22
Your solar career sector is hot. If you are seeking a career change, this might be the time to look around and maybe submit an application or two. Health concerns may pop up now that have to be dealt with. Don't procrastinate. Slow and steady wins the race.

LEO Jul 23 - Aug 22
Travel is indicated, possibly regarding career or business ventures. It's also a great time to visit friends and family. Seeking enlightenment may be on your list as well. All intellectual endeavours are favoured. Publishing, promoting and proselytizing are highlighted. It may be time for high adventure and visits to far-off, exotic places. Basically, a new restlessness begins to seep into your soul.

VIRGO Aug 23 - Sep 22
Wills, legacies, mysteries, hidden and secret matters, obscure facts and a whole lot of other unusual topics are on the cosmic menu for your perusal. Your solar eighth house of sex and death is lit up like a Christmas tree. Hmm, sounds interesting. Possibly, you will set off on a journey of discovery. Self discovery, that is.

LIBRA Sep 23 - Oct 22
Plan something special for May 6 and 7. Even if you don't plan anything, those days may turn out to be special anyway. A whirlwind of activity is indicated throughout the month. Jupiter is practically stopped right in the middle of Libra. It's a strong indicator that some type of good fortune may manifest.

SCORPIO Oct 23 - Nov 21
You're in your solar low until May 20. It may be time for some rest and recreation. Scorpio people are driven sometimes to exhaustion and burnout. Nature and nurture sound about right. Actually, this is a good month to create a new plan, a health plan and a plan of how to put it all together.

SAGITTARIUS Nov 22 - Dec 21
Read the Scorpio message and apply it to yourself, especially in the last half of the month. Life's demands intensify and there may be more than a few battles going on. No sense being too anxious about it. Take things one day at a time and, by the by, the storm clouds will pass. Patience is key.

CAPRICORN Dec 22 - Jan 19
Lord Saturn lingers in your solar 12th house until the winter solstice. The 12th house is the cosmic dustbin in which we have stored all kinds of karmic attachments. It's your time to do some spring cleaning on a cosmic level. Clear out everything that truly does not pertain to your health and happiness.

AQUARIUS Jan 20 - Feb 19
Ketu, the south node of the Moon, has started his journey through Aquarius. Basically, Ketu seeks freedom, knowledge and enlightenment. Curious Aquarius never could resist touching the "Wet Paint" sign. Now, a journey of discovery has commenced. Eighteen months from now you will be amazed at where you got to and how much you have learned.

PISCES Feb 20 - Mar 20
It's a time of gathering and learning about all kinds of things. Many Pisces are otherworldly types who not always connected to mundane matters, but are wonderfully dynamic when it comes to the spirit of compassion, caring and love. It's thought that Pisces carries the collective wisdom of the other 11 signs combined.

Live and love the life you have

We must let go of the life we have planned, so as to accept the one that is waiting for us. – Joseph Campbell

Sometimes, it seems to me that unhappiness or dissatisfaction with life is the gap between what we have and what we wish we had.

Our culture emphasizes setting goals and striving for what we want. The marketplace is driven by the push for more and better. Fashions change so we must buy new clothes every season. Every year, there is a new smartphone so we must upgrade even though last year's works perfectly well.

My mother grew up during the depression and her motto was "reuse and recycle" long before the critical mass of consciousness made it a way of life. Those who have lived with scarcity see value in even the most insignificant things.

My grandmother, whose parents brought her here from Ukraine when she was but 13, had a mantra I heard over and over: "The most important things to have are your health and your education." In her mind, if you had those, you could take care of yourself and be happy.

Somewhere along the way, life for many ceased being about what we needed in order to survive. Gradually, it seems that what once were "wants" are now needs in our culture.

Life is too tenuous for us to rest our sense of peace or contentment on external circumstances.

Not everyone can have all their wants fulfilled. For those whose life is spent striving to fulfill those wants and to achieve the life they have pictured in their minds, there is a belief that when they achieve all of that they will be happy.

The problem with this is that there will always be more things to want. And things change. The perfect partner turns out to be something else altogether. Even a good person can leave the relationship or die. Job layoffs can drastically change one's financial situation.

Life is too tenuous for us to rest our sense of peace or contentment on external circumstances. We must create that within ourselves. We do this by being mindful of what *is* in our life, rather than what is missing. We also do this by not expecting that our lives will be perfect. We accept that yes, there will be pain and loss. It happens for everyone.

There can be a shift from a focus on "What do I need?" to "How can I be a positive force in all of the lives I touch, if only briefly?" Our own pain, struggles and disappointments can make us more compassionate towards others.

When our lives do not go as planned, that does not have to be a source of sadness. It means the illusion we formed in our minds was not real and there is another path for us. It's like we lost the script we had written for our lives and now we must ad lib.

Ad libbing can be both challenging and fun. It allows us to be spontaneous, in the moment, and able to respond to what is right in front of us, rather than to some idea in our mind. We become more authentic. If there is no script, we can make it up as we go along.

We can release attachments and respond to change, rather than resisting it. This relieves us of much self-created suffering. Our lives become lighter and we feel more freedom.

We can choose for a moment, or a lifetime, to let go of the struggle and embrace the joy.

Gwen Randall-Young is an author and psychotherapist in private practice. For articles and information about her books, "Deep Powerful Change" hypnosis CDs and "Creating Effective Relationships" series, visit www.gwen.ca 'Like' Gwen on Facebook for daily inspiration.

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The evolution of our healing

Take the next step

by Dane Stevens

Trauma is the most misdiagnosed, mistreated and ignored dis-ease in the world today. What we currently define as trauma is at the foundation of most mental health disorders. Fortunately, there is now a way to deal with this epidemic. The Neuro Trauma Healing Process can not only bring relief to those who need it, but it will also turn the tables on, and change the way we view and deal with, mental health altogether.

In today's society, we have learned to deal with pain and discomfort by trying to get rid of it. Our current medical model supports this by helping us to cut, mask or numb it out. Unfortunately, this approach points us in the wrong direction, away from the root cause, making resolution impossible.

The question that will produce lasting healing is not the knee-jerk reaction of "How do I get rid of this?" but rather "What is this?" This question will point us within, to where the cause of the condition we are experiencing originates, helping us to understand it and give it – *us* – what we need to heal. This simple act of connecting within our self is the very foundation of our healing.

It is no secret that the sub-conscious mind is the key to sustainable healing. For centuries, a primary focus in the fields of psychology and healing has been to free us from our past so we can be happy. The mystery has been how to access this mystical well of information, with certainty, in a safe and gentle manner. Like electricity, it has always been available; it just needed to be discovered before we could utilize it.

To understand how NTHP can heal trauma, we first need to understand how we process information.

Processing our life experiences goes something like this: raw data enters our consciousness first through the right hemisphere of the brain, where we experience the full sensation of the event. We see, hear, smell and feel the very essence of it. This information is then sent to the logical, ordered, left-hemisphere of the brain to be made sense of and filed. If the information is too scary, bizarre or overwhelming, the left-brain will be unable to deal with and file it. It will reject it and send it back to the right-brain.

What does the right-brain do then? It does what it is supposed to. It once again experiences the full picture and sensations of the event and sends it to the left-brain to be made sense of and filed. If the experience is still too much for the left-brain to handle, it will send it back to the right-brain yet again, and the cycle begins.

This stuck event looping within us trying to be processed is termed a "trauma." The brain's primary function is self-preservation so it will try and push these disruptive thoughts and feelings out of the way, forcing the cycling experience to the sub, or un-conscious. However, the event is still very much alive, looping in our nervous system, trapped as energy in our body.

Unless this energy is released and let go of, it will out-picture itself in our life as a negative pattern, chronic condition or addiction, carrying with it the same painful or dysfunctional sensations as the original event.

NTHP is a new person-centred modality that gives safe and direct access to the sub-conscious mind, where the cause of the dysfunction lives. Whether our chronic issue is with health, wealth, relationships or fulfillment, we are guided to the root cause and shown what and how to heal. The guidance is uniquely ours because it comes directly from our own sub-conscious. Through a left/right-brain process and guided meditations, we are able to unfreeze the looping in our nervous system, allowing it to process the experience and file it properly, naturally and easily. This will bring us back into the peace and power of the present moment.

Trauma may now be starting to get the attention it deserves, but it needs to be recognized for what it is: unfinished business that is a gateway to higher consciousness.

Through NTHP, we have an opening and an opportunity to stop deep-seated cycles of pain and abuse that have been passed on through generations. We can turn the momentum away from living in and passing on fear, separation and limitation, to creating healthy, loving and abundant lives. With the ability to safely and directly connect with the life inside us, we can bring our past to resolution. We can step into peace, passion and purpose and be the person we were meant to be.

This is not only the best thing we can do for our self, it is the best thing we can do for our families, communities and world.

Dane Stevens is the owner of An Extraordinary Life and The Healing Centre, and the developer of the Neuro Trauma Healing Process© (NTHP). To learn more, visit www.anextraordinarylife.ca Email info@anextraordinarylife.ca or call 778-319-0749.

Join Sea to Seed and "Over Grow the System"

by Bruce Mason

So much time and so many resources are being spent fighting against something. Pick a cause and there'll be placards, shouted chants, shared posts, too many marches, far too many speeches, ever more hand-wringing and much angst-ridden argument.

As essential as all these activities may seem, we won't find the urgent solutions we seek, and need, in what we're fighting against. Solutions will only be found in what we celebrate. That's only logical or perhaps "eco-logical" is a better word.

The route to real change (long overdue) is not in the extreme growth economy or wresting back the power – and greedy lifestyles – from the tiny, highly organized minority who have grabbed it, stole it and otherwise usurped it from the vast majority of us, for whom 'the system' no longer works. The real power is on the ground, in the soil, in the sun and water and in the hearts, minds and hands of the disenfranchised 90+%.

Since 2013, every May, a crew of musicians, farmers, filmmakers, writers and photographers have set off on a month-long Sea to Seed Tour, a sailing adventure through the Gulf Islands and Salish Sea, which includes, of course, Vancouver and Victoria. The goal is to promote a culture of resilient, localized food systems through music, feasts and story-telling, and to create lots of ripples. And to spread seeds too, widely and joyfully.

It's impossible to over-emphasize the importance of localizing food systems, homesteading, organic farming, community building and permaculture.

As Naomi Klein has advised, "We live in a time of overlapping crisis and need to connect the dots because we don't have time to solve each crisis sequentially. We need a movement that addresses all of them."

That describes the mission of "Over Grow the System's" Sea to Seed Tour: to connect farming communities, sown, nurtured and growing along the coast. It's impossible to over-emphasize the importance of localizing food systems, homesteading, organic farming, community building and permaculture, or engaging art and culture in supporting these wonderful initiatives. The music, farm-to-table feasts, educational forums and story-telling are creating positive change, rooted in the fertile soil of generative celebration, and cultivating a way of living with integrity.

Among the musicians is Atlanta-based Rising Appalachia, who are "beyond excited" to be part of Sea to Seed. For me, they were the hit of the 2015 Vancouver Folk Festival and because of high-

continued p.22…

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– Oscar Wilde

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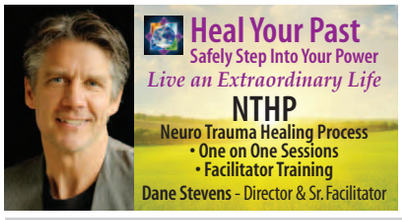
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Science Matters David Suzuki

ENVIRONMENT

Citizen assisted genetic testing

Since I started working as a geneticist in the early 1960s, the field has changed considerably. James Watson, Francis Crick and Maurice Wilkins won the 1962 Nobel Prize in physiology or medicine for their discovery of the double helix structure of DNA. Researchers then "cracked" the genetic code, which held promise for fields like health and medicine. It was an exciting time to be working in the lab.

More than 40 years later, in 2003, an international group of scientists sequenced the entire human genetic code. Researchers can now find a gene suspected to cause a disease in a matter of days, a process that took years before the Human Genome Project. As of 2013, more than 2,000 genetic tests were available for human conditions. Forty years ago, I never dreamed scientists would have the knowledge and manipulative capabilities that have become standard practice today.

In 2003, an international group of scientists sequenced the entire human genetic code.

In a couple of decades, genetics has allowed for systematic inventorying of the world's biodiversity. Canada's Centre for Biodiversity Genomics at the University of Guelph has the genomes of more than 265,000 named species identified with barcodes in its database. The cost to analyze a sample against this free public database is about $10.

Young citizen scientists in San Diego were recently able to help compile information about the area's biodiversity through their local libraries. Kids signed out genetic testing kits… through Catalog of Life @ the Library.

People in Canada can also help identify seafood fraud with the LifeScanner service. Genetic testing helps consumers identify the species and possibly the origin of fish they buy, important for people who care about sustainability and health and nutrition.

Identifying and tracing seafood has long been a challenge, especially because about 40 percent of wild-caught seafood is traded internationally and labelling is often inadequate. Once fish are skinned, cleaned and packaged, it's not always easy to tell what they are. If you buy something labelled "rockfish" in Canada, it could be one of more than 100 species. Often, labels don't indicate whether the fish were caught or processed sustainably. Although the European Union and US require more information on seafood labels than Canada, one study found 41 percent of US seafood is mislabelled.

A European study found stronger policies combined with public information led to less mislabelling. People in Canada have demanded better legislation to trace seafood products. More than 12,000 people recently sent letters to government asking for better labelling.

SeaChoice (the David Suzuki Foundation is a member) is working with LifeScanner to register 300 people in Canada to test seafood, in part to determine whether labels are accurate.

With the help of citizen scientists, genetic testing can offer a powerful approach to righting environmental wrongs. Combining crowd-sourced scientific data, public policy reform and consumer activism is already showing positive results. The same approach could work in areas such as testing for antibiotics, pesticide and mercury residues and more.

Excerpted from "Citizen science and genetic testing yield positive results." **David Suzuki** is a scientist, broadcaster, author and co-founder of the David Suzuki Foundation. Written with contributions from David Suzuki Foundation senior editor Ian Hanington. Learn more at www.davidsuzuki.org

INDEPENDENT MEDIA David Christopher

MEDIA

RCMP admits to cellphone spying

Finally. After years of obfuscation, the RCMP has admitted they are using invasive surveillance devices known as IMSI-catchers or Stingrays to spy on Canadians' cell phones. The admission came early last month, seemingly prompted by revelations from CBC News that Stingray devices had been in use in downtown Ottawa and at the international airport in Montreal.

In those instances, Public Safety Minister Ralph Goodale issued a strong denial that Canadian agencies, such as the RCMP or CSIS, were involved, but the controversy brought a great deal of public attention to the RCMP's own use of Stingray devices.

Stingrays are deeply problematic for a number of reasons. About the size of a small suitcase, they operate by mimicking a wireless tower, tricking all cell phones within a radius of up to two kilometres into switching their connection to the Stingray. Once that connection is made, instead of targeting just a single device, Stingrays indiscriminately vacuum up sensitive personal information from all devices within range, essentially making them a tool of mass surveillance.

There's no need to be a target of a police investigation to have your private information compromised; you just need to be in the wrong place at the wrong time. And when you consider just how many cell phones are located within a two-kilometre radius of, say, a downtown Toronto intersection, that gives some indication of just how many Canadians have likely been impacted.

There's no need to be a target of a police investigation to have your private information compromised.

Secondly, Stingrays are capable of collecting information on everything from your location to details of every call, email and text you make. They can even listen in on and record the content of cell phone calls. Nor should we be reassured by the RCMP saying they only use Stingrays to collect location and device identification metadata. As Brenda McPhail of the Canadian Civil Liberties Association points out, "Metadata includes location information. That is intimately personal. The fact that they only collect metadata doesn't let them off the hook."

For those of us working in the field of digital privacy, the RCMP's belated admission did not exactly come as a surprise. It will, however, hopefully prompt the informed democratic debate Canadians deserve about whether the use of these surveillance devices can ever be justified and, if so, what safeguards are necessary to protect the public's privacy?

Unfortunately, the RCMP left many important questions unanswered. Why not tell us how many innocent Canadians have had their private information compromised over the past 10 years? Or let us know whether Stingrays have ever been used to monitor a political protest? And why did the RCMP wait until just a few weeks ago before applying for permission from Innovation, Science, and Economic Development Canada to use the devices?

Last, but far from least, the fact that the use of Stingrays can apparently be authorized based merely on suspicion of wrongdoing is hugely worrying. Surely, a much higher standard of evidence should be required, given the serious privacy implications for the general public?

It's clear we deserve answers to all these questions from Public Safety Minister Ralph Goodale. Canadians should keep up the pressure on the government by supporting our 48,000-strong campaign at StopStingrays.org

David Christopher is communications manager for OpenMedia, a community-based organization that works to keep the Internet open, affordable and surveillance-free. openmedia.org

Lillooet mayor champions the return of the train

They used to come for the Gold Rush. Now, they come for the rush. – Old BC Rail slogan

by Ray Kowalchuk

Caribou Prospector crossing a trestle at Cheakamus Canyon, north of Squamish. Photo courtesy Lillooet Museum

Ray Kowalchuk: What inspired your "Bring Back the North Vancouver to Prince George Passenger Train" petition?

Margaret Lampman: I was contacted by the general chairman of Teamsters Canada – they are the union that represents all the railways – to talk this up again because of the lack of accessibility and tourism opportunities for, not only Lillooet, but for the province of BC.

RK: Tell us about the history of the rail line and how important it was in the region.

ML: When it [the Cariboo Prospector] was operating, it used to come into Lillooet three times a week and it gave tourists the opportunity to visit with us for three hours at a time, which was an immense influx of money into the small business community. And it helped them through the leaner times of the winter months. It also allowed our residents to take the train down to the Lower Mainland to access family and medical help or to go north to Prince George for work or social activities. The business community really took a huge blow when the train was deleted due to the lack of those tourists and activity, which is too bad because we like to support our local businesses and it also dropped our tourism in general, which affects your bottom line immensely. Let's face it, tourists can become residents. That's the cycle and how economics works. It was really hurtful for our residents who couldn't get out of town if they didn't have a vehicle. I keep saying, and will continue to say, we have no bus service in Lillooet.

When it [the Cariboo Prospector] was operating... it gave tourists the opportunity to visit with us for three hours at a time, which was an immense influx of money into the small business community. And it helped them through the leaner times of the winter months.

RK: How did this hit the community?

ML: We had so many BC Rail employees living in the community that, when it was dispersed, quite a few of those employees, in order to keep working, had to be stationed in other areas. So it hit us hard by taking those families who were living here and supporting the businesses, our rec centre, medical facilities and schools. It was tough on the community as a whole. We felt the effects of it all down the line.

RK: How has the deletion of the passenger rail service and the sale of BC Rail in 2002 impacted you personally?

ML: On the personal side, it has hurt me because I have been involved in government for so long that I hear stories of people who have had to hire someone to take them down for medical treatment at a really high cost and that individual then has to decide whether or not to even get treatment. That should not be taking place.

RK: Why did tourists love the rail line?

ML: It has to be some of the most gorgeous scenery anywhere in the world. As you leave North Vancouver, alongside the ocean to the west and the mountains to the east, and coming into Whistler, you travel along rivers and lakes, cutting through mountains and then into the dry air of Lillooet. It drops down and you see our desert canyons – I call it Canada's only Grand Canyon – and then heads north to some of the most spectacular ranchlands around, right up to Prince George. And the scenery all the way up there is just fantastic.

RK: What steps are you taking to bring the issue to the current government and what is planned for the future negotiations regarding passenger rail service?

Mayor Margaret Lampman of Lillooet

ML: I started a letter writing campaign with all of the mayors, regional district chairs, First Nations communities as well as tourism operators from North Vancouver to Prince George. That resulted in a lot of letters of support going to the premier and Minister Stone. We have been working as a little group of cohorts to go to the next step. The response was overwhelming so I am working with the mayor of North Vancouver. He kindly offered his office to set up the meeting and through him we also have the support of the mayor of the district of West Vancouver as well as the MPs from down there, and so the request is in. If we do get that meeting, all the mayors will sit down with the minister, ask him and his staff to contact a private company, like Via Rail, asking for a them to provide a business proposal, then a business plan. That would be a huge win for us.

RK: How optimistic are you?

ML: I'm always an optimist and I think if we have a meeting and the minister looks around at that table and sees all of the support letters and mayors, it will be hard not to agree. I'm still waiting for more support letters to come in from different tourist agencies and businesses, international tourism operators and the teamsters. We will hopefully then have convinced him to give that directive to make it happen.

Ray Kowalchuk is a semi-retired carpenter and naturalist who moved from his home city of Burnaby seven years ago into the mountains of Seton Portage, BC.
kowal@writeme.com

Sign the petition!

www.change.org/p/premier-gov-bc-ca-bring-back-the-north-vancouver-to-prince-george-passenger-train

Events

For rates & placements email **editor@commonground.ca**

March Against Monsanto May 20

MAY 10, JUNE 8
Free events: Wesak Festival May 10. Festival of Humanity June 8. Introduction followed by group meditation. 7PM, Central Library, 350 Georgia St., Peter Kaye Room, www.share-international.ca

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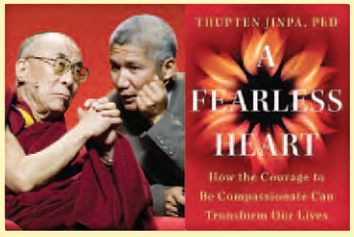

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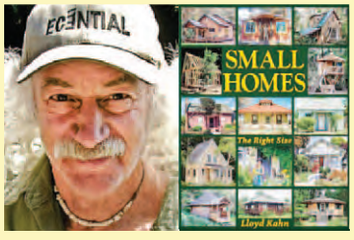

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MAY 11-JUN 3
MAMA Project: Presented by Deer Lake Art Gallery. Opening receiption May 13, 6:30PM. Live performance Supermama. Open Mother's Day May 14, 11AM-5PM. MAMA Conversation May 14, 3-4PM. 6584 Deer Lake Ave., 604-298-7322, www.burnabyartscouncil.org

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Online Open House May 24, 7PM.

MAY 12-14
"The Quest for Truth" with Dr. P. Krishna (www.pkrishna.org) at Krishnamurti Educational Centre of Canada. Beautiful oceanfront setting near Victoria. Register at www.krishnamurti-canada.ca Email programs@krishnamurti-canada.ca, 250-744-3354.

MAY 17
Free talk at UBC: Dr. Thupten Jinpa
"A Fearless Heart." 7PM. More info banyen.com, 604-737-8858.

MAY 20
March Against Monsanto
Join activists around the world. Info: www.march-against-monsanto.com

MAY 21
Richmond: Free Workshop "Inner and Outer Peace," Theory and Practice of Inner Light Meditation. 2-4 PM, Meditation & Ecology Centre. Please pre-register: Linda, 604-985-5840.

MAY 22
Holly Near Concert: "Singing For Our Lives" w/Tammy Hall, Jan Martinelli, Tori Trujillo. St. James Hall, 7:30PM, $30-$45, www.soundsandfuries.com/concerts.html

MAY 23
Free talk at Vancouver Public Library. Lloyd Kahn "Small Homes." 7PM. More info banyen.com, 604-737-8858.

MAY 23
Vancouver: Free Workshop "Inner and Outer Peace," Theory and Practice of Inner Light Meditation. 6-9 PM, Science of Spirituality. Please pre-register: Linda, 604-985-5840.

MAY 27
Free Open House - Institute of Holistic Nutrition (Vancouver): Course/Career opportunities, exhibits, lectures & more. 10AM-4PM, 604 West Broadway, Ste. 300. 604-558-4000. Lecture descriptions at www.instituteofholisticnutrition.com

MAY 27-28
Inner Engineering with Sadhguru – Vancouver Convention Centre. Learn a powerful, 21-minute practice. This is an advanced level program. Pre-requisite: completion of Inner Engineering Online, which can be done in the convenience of your home. www.InnerEngineering.com, 604-900-1913.

MAY 28
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JUN 19-21
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WEDNESDAYS
Tao Wellness Evening: Discover techniques to promote wellness, 7-9pm, Soul Mind Body Centre, 9-1128 West Broadway, Vancouver. 778-379-9920, SoulMindBodyCentre.com

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...*Michael Hudson* *from pg. 3*

banks will say, "Never mind, we're not going to lose a penny on that because the land is more valuable."

And if enough families can go broke and be foreclosed on, the banks will then say, "Okay, look, we have a big parcel of land. We've got the homeowners off. They've had to leave because of debt. Now, we can be building another great big office building."

JR: How does foreign debt and foreign capital affect our housing and economy? Japan once held the most US capital debt, mostly in US treasury bonds, and now it's China. These debt-rich countries go to the US to cash in that debt. They want to buy a super-port or Standard Oil of California and the US says, "No it is not in our national interest." How do they unload their US treasury bonds? Does Canada accept US treasury bonds from China and other countries as currency?

MH: Well, yes. They're certainly marketable and any country is willing to buy treasury bonds at pretty much the market price. Maybe a teeny margin below. The US, as Obama said, is the "exceptional country." What does that mean? That means we don't have to obey international law. International law is for other people. We're the exception to international law. We're the only country in the world that doesn't have to obey international law.

We don't obey any foreign court. We don't obey the international courts. We don't obey the Geneva Convention. Because we're the "exceptional country." We insist that other countries open their market to American investors to buy their commanding heights and then privatize them and treat their infrastructure as monopolies. But we won't let China even buy gas stations in the US when it wanted to buy a set of oil distributors on the west coast. This is the double standard and it's why China and Russia and Iran and other countries said it's a guaranteed losing game. "They want to buy us but they won't let us buy anything."

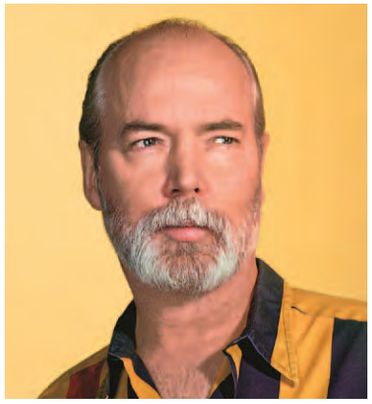
JR: If a country doesn't play along with the US empire, the empire strikes back.

MH: Yes. As it did in Chile.

JR: America has a list of countries that won't comply to their unipolar world currency. Would it make sense to have more than *continued p.23...*

BC Book Awards celebrating the year's brightest & best

Publishing is obsessed with "winners," but I've always thought literary prizes are earned while winners are for lotteries. Still, awards recognize writers, endangered in our post-truth, anti-intellectual world. And they help sell books at a time when too many people don't read and the average human attention span has shrunk to less than the seven seconds of a goldfish's memory.



Douglas Coupland, recipient of this year's Lieutenant Governor's Award for Literary Excellence. Photo courtesy of Random House, www.randomhousebooks.com

Since 1985, the non-profit West Coast Book Prize Society has drawn attention to the achievements of writers, publishers and illustrators in our part of the world. Since you are now reading, *Common Ground* hopes the 33rd annual BC Book Prizes' list, and a bit about each, will encourage you to continue reading and support local writing.

Douglas Coupland has earned the Lieutenant Governor's Award for Literary Excellence. His first novel, the 1991 international bestseller *Generation X: Tales for an Accelerated Culture,* popularized such terms as "McJob "and "Gen X." He's published 13 novels, two short story collections, seven non-fiction books, drama, film and TV screenplays. Coupland's latest works include the novel, *Worst. Person. Ever.*, an updated *City of Glass,* and a biography of Marshall McLuhan. His art includes "everywhere is anywhere is anything is everything," exhibited at the Vancouver Art Gallery and Royal Ontario Museum.

The Lieutenant Governor's Award, established in 2003 by Hon. Iona Campagnolo, is $5,000. The awards – fiction, non-fiction, poetry, children's literature, children's illustrated literature, books about BC and the BC Bookseller's Choice – are $2,000 each. Jennifer Manuel receives the **Ethel Wilson Fiction Prize** for *The Heaviness of Things That Float* (Douglas and McIntyre). The story: the lonely world of Bernadette, a community nurse, who's served for 40 years on a remote west coast First Nations reserve. A compelling debut novel, it explores the delicate dynamic with non-native outsiders and evokes desolate, beautiful and untamed Vancouver Island.

The Roderick Haig-Brown Regional Prize recognizes contributions to enjoyment and understanding of BC. This year's winner is *Mapping My Way Home: A Gitxsan History* (Creekstone Press) by Neil J. Sterritt. His book traces European explorers and adventurers in the economic hub of 150 years ago, at the junction of the Skeena and Bulkley rivers. A Gitxsan leader, Sterritt also shares stories of his people, both ancient and recent.

The 2017 Hubert Evans Non-Fiction Prize was presented **to** Deborah Campbell for *A Disappearance in Damascus: A Story of Friendship and Survival in the Shadow of War* (Knopf Canada). In 2007, on assignment for *Harper's* magazine, she witnessed millions of displaced Iraqi refugees flooding into Syria during the increasingly violent aftermath of the 2003 US-led invasion. By personalizing the ongoing tragedy, she provides deeper understanding of the Syrian civil war and refugee crisis and deep ramifications that war has had on the Middle East.

Adèle Barclay earned the **Dorothy Livesay Poetry Prize** for *If I Were in a Cage I'd Reach Out for You* (Nightwood Editions). She is quoted as saying, poetry is "a counter-spell to the Neoliberal, patriarchal, white supremacist, mess... Poetry resists, something that is at home with messiness and paradoxes. I think radical kinship or radical kindness and being public about emotional vulnerability... saying those things out loud, is political. Or at least I hope so."

The Christie Harris Illustrated Children's Literature Prize for best illustrated book was awarded to *My Heart Fills with Happiness* (Orca), written by Monique Gray Smith, illustrated by Julie Flett. The charming board book not only celebrates indigenous culture and community, but also everyone's ability to find joy in the small details of everyday life. The best non-illustrated book written for children – **Sheila A. Egoff Children's Literature Prize** – is awarded to Iain Lawrence for *The Skeleton Tree* (Tundra Books). A nail-biting, page-turning survival story, it's packed with psychological suspense and action, focused on an evolving relationship between two boys stranded in the Alaskan wilderness. Like all 15 books by this acclaimed author, including *Gemini Summer*, which earned the Governor-General's Literary Award for Children's Literature, this is a wonderful read for all ages.

Finally, the 2017 **Bill Duthie Booksellers' Choice Award** is bitter-sweet. It's awarded to Richard Wagamese, who died in March, at age 61. *Embers: One Ojibway's Meditations* (Douglas and McIntyre) is among 13 books by one of Canada's foremost First Nations authors and storytellers. Honest, evocative and articulate, this is a collection of hard-won wisdom by the late, self-described "spiritual bad-ass." More than ever, First Nations stories are being shared.

Finalist authors tour BC schools and libraries. And the Society also coordinates the adopt-a-Library program.

Bruce Mason is a Vancouver and Gabriola Island-based banjo player, gardener, writer and author of **Our Clinic.**

...***Sea to Seed*** *from pg. 14*

demand, were brought back to town for concerts. Backstage they said, "We're trying to take the glitz and glam out of the music industry and bring performance back to its roots… where musicians influence the cultural shift as troubadours, activists and catalysts of justice and aren't just part of fast-paced entertainment." (*Common Ground*, August, 2015, http://commonground.ca/slow-music-the-summer-of-transformation/)

Rising Appalachia has toured Europe, the Caribbean, Central America, the Indian subcontinent, US and Canada "to help the environment, change the 'maldistribution' of wealth and to simply make the world better." Their Slow Music movement, inspired by the Slow Food movement, utilizes 'non-industry methods,' such as linking communities, pursuing alternative venues, supporting local businesses and non-profits and exploring transportation alternatives, including trains, bikes, low-impact vehicles, boats, horses and now: sailboats.

In partnership with "Over Grow the System" are companies like Guayaki Yerba Mate and internationally-touring musicians. Joining the slow-travel, small-scale-living adventure are Dustin Thomas, Peia Bird and Tarran the Tailor.

Visit www.overgrowthesystem.org for more information about the Sea to Seed Tour, including a wealth of inspiring videos and a cornucopia of food for thought and activity.

Our greatest challenges are not global warming, resource depletion, politics, pollution or financial shocks, all symptoms of a system that is neither sustainable, nor fair. Our greatest challenge is our lack of connection with nature and with each other – a disconnection that has spawned an insatiable, ubiquitous greed.

"Over Grow the System" offers a life-affirming, alternative model. Be part of the evolution and support the Sea to Seed Tour.

The Sea to Seed Tour: As you read this, the tour is on track. It will touch down on Mayne (9th), Salt Spring (12th), Galiano (13th) Gabriola (14th) and Denman (18th) Islands. It will be in Lund on the 19th and on the Sunshine Coast the following day. It arrives in Victoria on May 22 and in Vancouver on May 23. Ticket info at www.overgrowthesystem.org

...*Michael Hudson* *from pg. 21*

one international currency system in the world?

MH: That is happening. That would be called a 'multi-polar world' and that's exactly what countries out of the US are saying. That's why China and Russia are moving closer together. They have a bank clearing system to replace the American/European bank clearing system to clear bank transfers in case the US says they will wreck their banking economy by unplugging them electronically from SWIFT system (Society for Worldwide Interbank Financial Telecommunication). They're having their own systems.

Other countries are having to protect themselves by withdrawing from the globalization order. That's exactly why you have Brexit in England. The French election debated this. And north Italy parties are threatening to withdraw from the Euro Zone. The most active people supporting withdrawal from the Euro are the Portuguese because so many Portuguese are having to emigrate to Brazil where they speak the same language. Spain. And of course Greece.

So America, in being the "exceptional country," with its double standard, says, "If you don't do what we tell you, we're going to treat you like we treated Gaddafi or Saddam or Assad." Other people can say we want to decouple as quickly as we can. Globalization really means a US double standard of military, economic and financial control while other countries are trying to survive because, for them, this is really a new feudalism.

JR: So what's different today from 30, 40 or 50 years ago in terms of the housing situation?

MH: Well, here's the issue. Vancouver is part of a naturally rich British Columbia territory. It's well situated geographically. Who is all this natural wealth going to benefit? Is it going to benefit the citizens who live in Vancouver or are they going to let one percent of the population – the political insiders, the real estate developers and bankers – siphon all of this rising property and rental value of real estate, just take it for themselves and shift the tax burden on to the wage earners and the businesses? That's what's happening now.

The fact is that if Vancouver acted in the way that Adam Smith, John Stuart Mill and the classical economists urged, they would say, "Look, all this rising land value should be in the tax base." Suppose this vast amount – really, I think a trillion dollars by now over the last decade of increased land value – suppose that instead of leaving it to landlords to be paid out as interest to the banks, this had been the tax base. Vancouver could've supplied public services freely. It could have free transportation, free schooling. There's no need for Vancouver to have a sales tax. There's no need for it to have an income tax because these taxes raise the cost of living and, therefore, raise the cost of doing business.

When Vancouver lets the real estate developers and the banks benefit from all this rise in the price of land that increases the cost of living to new buyers, that means you're priced out of the market. In order to get a job in Vancouver and live here, you have to earn over $100,000 a year. In other parts of the world, people are able to do the same job for much less because they haven't had a real estate boom. So it turns out the real estate boom that people think is a sign of prosperity and wealth is actually impoverishing Vancouver by driving it into debt. In order to buy into the real estate boom, new buyers have to take on an enormous new debt and the result will leave Vancouver debt strapped.

JR: People are pressured into playing the game.

MH: They really believe it's still possible to get rich by going into debt, and for 50 years after WWll ended in 1945, that was the case. You could buy a house and as the economy got richer, the value of the house would go up and cities built more parks and schools and urban amenities. The value would go up, but all of that has now reached a limit.

Who is all this natural wealth going to benefit? Is it going to benefit the citizens who live in Vancouver or are they going to let one percent of the population – the political insiders, the real estate developers and bankers – siphon all of this rising property and rental value of real estate, just take it for themselves and shift the tax burden on to the wage earners and the businesses?

When I first went to work on Wall Street, with the Citizens Savings Bank And Trust Company, basically banks would lend mortgages only if the cost of servicing a mortgage absorbed 25% of their income. If the mortgage costs were more than a quarter of your income, the bank would say, "Sorry, you can't afford it." Well, now in the US, almost all residential mortgages below super castles are government-guaranteed up to 43% of the wage earner's income, of the borrower's income.

Now, just imagine if you have to pay 43% of your income for a mortgage or for rent. In NYC, it's common to pay 40% of your income for rent. You may also have to pay another 10% of your income for other debt – credit card, student loan, auto debts. There's about a 15% automatic wage withholding for a very regressive social security tax and a healthcare tax. Then about 10-15% more regular income taxes and sales taxes. People don't realize that only about 25-30% of the average family budget in America can be spent on goods and services. So how is the economy going to afford to buy what it produces? It can't. Most people in NYC cannot afford to go out and eat in restaurants anymore so all over the city restaurants are closing down. In fact, all over the US. In March, it was announced that corporate and business bankruptcies are way, way up. The trend is for bankruptcies.

The Barnes and Noble where I live in New York has gone out of business. The bookstores I used to know are all out of business. Near NY University, on 8th Street, the main street, which used to be the street for bookstores and other big shopping, half of the storefronts are all boarded up, for rent, empty, going out of business.

And in Vancouver, the first day I was here, we walked down a big major street with wonderful art galleries going out of business. Other stores for rent, going out of business. Other buildings obviously had just been renovated, empty, nobody in them. So the effect is to empty out Vancouver.

JR: And who profits from that?

MH: Ultimately, the banks profit because most of the real estate is bought on credit. As I said, the motto of real estate investors is "rent is for paying interest." They'll pay all of the increased rental value to the bank as interest because they're hoping for a capital gain because that's where the action has been for the last 50 years in the US. Not income. Most people have got rich, not by saving their earnings, but by the capital gain, which includes middle class families that got rich by their house appreciating. That's why groups that are left out of home ownership have missed this whole capital gain bit.

So you're having a bifurcated economy: an economy between a generation that inherits trust funds and is able to sort of live on money that their wealthy parents have made in the financial real estate sector and people who don't inherit trust funds and are literally the disinherited. This polarization is going to widen and widen and become increasingly a political crisis.

JR: The inequality gap that's occurring is astounding.

MH: And that should be what economics is all about. But if you look at all of the economic models, they're all about equilibrium. The pretense – and this is junk economics – is that if an economy gets out of balance, automatic stabilizers return it to equilibrium. The reality is just the opposite: once an economy gets out of balance, it tends to veer further and further out of balance. Mathematicians call that hysteresis. Until there's a crash.

JR: And there will be continual crashes because…

MH: Because they'll get bigger and bigger and these economic crashes will be turned into political crashes.

JR: Thank you so much for this insightful conversation.

MH: Well, it's been really good to be in Vancouver because I'm impressed by how many people really do understand the problems with finance and real estate. Obviously, there's a lot of frustration in it not getting through politically. So the problem is how do they translate this economic understanding that things are out of balance into a political policy and movement that will put it back in balance?

And it can be put back in balance by a combination of fiscal policy, tax policy and financial policy. But it requires an educated electorate.

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